

RIKERS CANNOT BE REFORMED

IT MUST BE CLOSED



From the days of Fugitive Slave Laws until now, Rikers Island has robbed generations of Black, Brown, and poor New Yorkers of their freedom and their human rights. Its time to shut it down.

IT'S BUILT TO MASS INCARCERATE - Rikers isn't a prison, and it's not just one jail – it's a penal colony of 10 jails, with a total capacity of 14,700 beds. As of May 25, 2022, **90% of people incarcerated on Rikers were awaiting trial** – incarcerated before a conviction, many of them because they could not afford the bail a judge set. **Black New Yorkers are incarcerated at Rikers at 10 times the rate of white New Yorkers.**

IT DEFIES OVERSIGHT - The isolation of Rikers has enabled a culture of impunity to take hold in an environment where guards have been able to basically govern the island by their own rules. Federal prosecutors have sued the City of New York over what a Justice **Department investigation called a "pervasive and deep-seated culture of violence."**

IT'S TOXIC - Rikers Island was only 87 acres when it was first designated to become New York City's primary jail site. It was expanded to over 400 acres using garbage and prison labor from Blackwell's Island. Today, the **decomposing landfill emits toxic methane gas** that threatens the health of the people who are held there and who work there. Because the buildings sit on decomposing landfill, the ground underneath them shifts, causing cracks in the walls and ceilings. People incarcerated at Rikers frequently report insect and rodent infestations, and faulty plumbing including discolored water and broken toilets.

IT'S ISOLATED - Rikers Island is accessible by only one long bridge and one City bus line. This isolation means public defenders and social workers, juggling many cases, struggle to make time to travel to Rikers to meet with their clients. **Family members must devote an entire day for a brief visit to their loved ones.** Banishing accused people to a distant island fuels the misguided idea that they should be harshly punished and kept far away from their families and communities.



Illustration by @corilinar

IT DOESN'T WORK – Rikers doesn't prevent crime or even address it. People with addiction and mental illness get no substantial treatment. People struggling with homelessness and joblessness return to the same challenges. Young people are exposed to untold violence – an environment that could not possibly prevent future violence. **No one comes back from Rikers better than when they went in.**

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THE PLAN TO CLOSE RIKERS

DECARCERATE: New York City has committed to reducing citywide jail capacity by 75%, and reducing the number of people in jail to no more than 3,300* by 2027. We will continue to fight to reduce incarceration as much as possible, as fast as possible, through both local and state action. To keep people from entering jail and languishing there, we'll need both reforms to protect people's rights within the criminal legal system, and investments to meet community needs.

DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF INCARCERATED PEOPLE: Even as we focus on reducing incarceration, conditions of confinement matter while anyone is still inside. Under the plan to close Rikers, not just the Rikers jails will be closed, but also the run-down jails that currently exist in the boroughs. The old borough jails in the Bronx, Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens will be replaced with facilities that will allow for more freedom of movement, more program and visiting space, and more personal space. These transformed physical conditions are necessary, but not sufficient. The city must also take the next steps to change the way the Department of Correction operates – for example, by ending solitary confinement, and holding officers accountable for misconduct.



Illustration by @corilinnart

The plan to close Rikers and replace the borough-based jails was built through years of organizing by the communities most directly impacted by Rikers Island, and a broad coalition of faith leaders, grassroots organizations and service providers. This plan is of course about closing the ten jails on Rikers, but it's also about **decarceration, defending the rights of incarcerated people, and divestment & redistribution.**

DIVEST & REDISTRIBUTE: Closing Rikers and reducing the number of people in jail to less than 3,300 creates an opportunity to save at least \$1.8 billion annually in jail operations costs. That money can be reinvested in housing, healthcare, education, economic development, youth services, and more. Those resources are the foundation of community safety, but have too long been underfunded. Along with the plan to close Rikers, the city committed to \$265M in community investments - a small but important start to addressing the decades of neglect that have devastated Black, Brown, and poor communities. Through the Commission on Community Reinvestment and the Closure of Rikers, people most impacted by mass incarceration will guide the next steps for community reinvestment in our city.

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